



State Representative Barbara Bailey

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House Committees:

- Appropriations
- Economic Development, Agriculture and Trade
- Health Care

Other committees:

- Joint Select Committee on Military and Veteran Affairs
- Joint Legislative and Executive Task Force on Long Term Care Financing and Chronic Care Management
- Certificate of Need
- Governor's Global Competitive Council
- Joint Legislative Task Force on Mental Health
- Joint Select Committee on Pension Policy

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Representative Barbara Bailey

2006 Session Review

Successes, Disappointments and Missed Opportunities

10th Legislative District

May 2006

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2006 Legislative session was a mix of successes, disappointments and missed opportunities.

I fought for a fiscally-responsible budget that puts money away for the future in a protected rainy-day account and limits government spending. Yet we were taken in the wrong direction with a record spending increase of 17.7 percent, creating an unsustainable budget.

I fought for affordable health care choices, mandate-free coverage, health savings accounts, and a competitive market that attracts more doctors and health care providers. Yet the state was pushed closer to subsidized, government-run health care.

I fought to protect and to reform critical area ordinances and to preserve the farmer's right to farm. Unfortunately the interest of government prevailed over the interest of property owners.

There were some successes. We passed **stronger laws against sex offenders, some tax relief for our farmers, assistance for students taking the WASL, home heating help for low-income and elderly citizens, eliminated the state park day-use fee** and repealed the **nursing home bed tax**.

Unfortunately, the Legislature could have done better. I am committed to fight on your behalf for a safer, stronger, more prosperous community and a more responsible and responsive government.

I am honored to serve you. I always welcome and appreciate your thoughts and concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my office.

Sincerely,

Barbara Bailey
State Representative

THE SESSION AT A GLANCE

Disappointments

- Record spending
- Unsustainable budget
- Pension liability not adequately funded
- The death tax lives on
- No significant health care reform
- Medical malpractice reform falls short
- Nothing to improve state's business climate
- Stronger laws against auto theft, identity theft, meth refused

Accomplishments

- Tougher sex offender penalties
- State park day-use fee eliminated
- Home heating assistance provided
- Some tax relief for farmers
- Breakthrough water agreements
- Stronger drunk driving penalties
- Additional help with the WASL

Coffee anyone?

I'm always interested in your thoughts, comments, suggestions and questions. What better way to do it than over a cup of coffee? I will soon be holding informal coffee meetings throughout the 10th District. I'd like to meet you and hear what's on your mind. Please keep an eye on our local newspapers for times and locations, or visit my website at <http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/bailey.htm>

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DISAPPOINTMENTS and MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Unsustainable budget includes record spending

With a budget surplus of \$1.6 billion, I had hoped that the Legislature would have paid its bills and put the remaining amount away in a protected rainy day fund. Instead, budget writers did quite the opposite. The supplemental budget spends \$468 million on new programs, and transfers \$825 million to other spending accounts. It adds 816 employees to the state payroll. It leaves an end balance of less than \$216 million and grows the biennial budget to a record \$29.6 billion.

Most disturbing is that this budget is not sustainable. This new spending means that in future years when there are no surpluses, the Legislature will be forced to deeply slash programs or significantly raise taxes. It's not what I consider a responsible way to budget for the taxpayers of our state.

Future pension costs remain unaddressed

The Legislature failed to pay down the state's pension liability in Plan 1 of the Public Employees Retirement System and the Teachers Retirement System. For the past four years, it has skipped \$350 million in payments to the pension system. We needed to pay this bill while we have the money. I prime-sponsored House Bill 2902, which would have covered those payments, saving taxpayers \$600 million. The plan adopted did nothing to save taxpayers' money and pushed our liability further into the future.

Fight continues for affordable private health care

One of my top priorities is accessible, affordable, consumer-driven health care for our citizens. I have fought for meaningful small business health care reform that would provide options so that employers could purchase affordable health plans for their employees. That fight continued this session. We came very close to reaching that goal by amending a measure to allow for flexible, low-cost and mandate-free health plan offerings, and expanded use of health savings accounts. Unfortunately, those amendments were later stripped from the bill and replaced with provisions that provide government-subsidized health care for about 2,000 people, a fraction of the state's 600,000 uninsured. Fortunately, the Legislature did approve health savings accounts for state employees.



Medical malpractice agreement = "Tort Lite"

After two initiatives were squashed at the ballot box in November, the governor brought interest groups together for a compromise. From the beginning, doctors were told that caps on malpractice awards were off the table. The deal reached provides for medical safety, insurance regulation and civil liability, including voluntary arbitration. Doctors recognized they had little choice but to accept the "tort lite" agreement as a first step forward, noting that a little progress was better than none at all. Time will tell whether this legislation will lower malpractice insurance costs and keep good doctors in the state.



Senate retires retire-rehire bill

House Bill 2698, the retire-rehire measure, passed the House unanimously. This is a bill I prime-sponsored to prevent teachers from retiring in name only and then returning to their old jobs while simultaneously collecting pay. Unfortunately, the Senate refused to bring the bill to a vote. They excused their action by saying they ran out of time (even though the Legislature finished a day early). I will keep trying until we can restore fairness to this system.

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SUCCESSSES

Sex offender laws strengthened

This year, we pushed for tougher laws against sex offenders. Nearly 50 bills were introduced. Several were signed into law. Most notable was a measure that sends sex offenders who molest children and vulnerable adults to prison for 25 years and provides tougher post-release supervision.

Support, options for the WASL

Several educational reforms were adopted, including one that provides additional remedial funding to help students pass the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning). Legislation was also approved to provide alternative assessments. Students who fail the exam can also get a diploma by demonstrating sufficient work samples approved by a state board. Those who fail the test but have a grade-point average equal to peers who passed could also graduate.

Bad bed tax eliminated

Finally, we are getting rid of the nursing home bed tax that has burdened families and our seniors. The Legislature approved, and I supported, a measure that eliminates the \$5.25-per-bed, per-day fee effective July 1, instead of phasing out the repeal over five years.



Many thanks to Coupeville resident Roger Sherman (right) who sought to add several "lost" islands to Island County that had been overlooked for 153 years. At his request, I sponsored House Bill 2908, which corrected this oversight. Mr. Sherman joined me as Gov. Christine Gregoire signed the bill into law.

Strengthening the family farm

Several important farm bills were signed into law, including:

- **FARM TAX BREAKS:** Under HB 2424, farmers won't have to pay the sales tax on diesel or aviation fuel used for farm applications, saving them about \$1,500 a year. A separate bill provides a sales tax exemption on replacement parts for used farm machinery.
- **WATER:** This agreement between conservationists and water users sets the stage for a 10-year, \$200 million bond package that increases water storage in the Columbia River basin.

Capital budget provides for local projects

The Legislature approved a \$278 million supplemental capital construction budget with money for various public construction projects throughout the state, including modifications to the Holmes Harbor sewer district wastewater treatment plant, replacement and expansion of a water line just outside of Oak Harbor along Highway 20 between Pass Lake and Sharpe's Corner, and water and sewer projects in Stanwood. Funding was also provided for the Skagit Comprehensive Irrigation District Plan.

Nearly \$900,000 was appropriated for improvements to our state parks at Camano Island, Deception Pass and Possession Point.

SMALL SUCCESSSES

State parks day-use fee eliminated

Our state parks belong to all citizens. Attendance, however, has declined by more than 20 percent since the day-use fee was enacted. This year, the Legislature repealed that fee, giving families better access to our state parks.

Home heating assistance provided

The home heating assistance bill, which provides \$7.6 million in energy assistance to our low-income and elderly citizens, was the first bill passed by the Legislature this year and signed into law.

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Protection for local farmers

I prime-sponsored several measures to help our local farmers continue their long-standing agricultural practices. Unfortunately, none of these bills was allowed to move forward.

- **CHANGING THE GROWTH HEARINGS BOARDS** to require that at least one member of each board is a property owner subject to critical area ordinance regulations. HB 2906 would also have required all governor-appointed members to be confirmed by the Senate prior to serving on the growth hearings boards.
- **ALLOWING ADDITIONAL BUSINESS OPTIONS FOR FARMERS:** Land-use restrictions have made it difficult for farmers to make a living. HB 2905 would have allowed nonagricultural activities that support farming to be conducted on land designated for agricultural use.
- **PRESERVING PRE-EXISTING AGRICULTURAL USES:** HB 2907 would have protected the ability of people to continue farming activities on their agricultural lands.



Protecting NAS Whidbey's future

Naval Air Station Whidbey accounts for more than \$767 million in wages and nearly 88 percent of our local economy in Island County. It's important that its future be protected.



It was a very strong effort from our local community, including the Oak Harbor mayor and city council, Island County Commissioners, and the military, who joined with me to help ensure the previously committed money of \$5 million stayed in the budget so that Oak Harbor can purchase a buffer zone around the air station.

This 18-acre zone will prevent adjacent development, protect it from future base closure proceedings, and allow flight and training operations to continue unimpeded.

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